

Gloucestershire County Council
Childrens services

Private Fostering Service

Statement of Purpose



Introduction

This statement sets out the duties and functions of Gloucestershire County Council Children and Children and Young People's Services in relation to Private Fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out.

The duties and functions are based on the legislative framework of the 1989 Children Act, the Children Act 2004, and subsequent regulations, The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.

The National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 2005 specify that each local authority should have a written statement or plan setting out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering.

Legal definition of a privately fostered child

A child or young person under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) who is cared for by someone other than a parent or a relative (as defined under the 1989 Children Act), with the intention that the arrangement should last for 28 days or more, and in an arrangement made privately, (that is without the involvement of the local authority).

Duties and Functions of the Local Authority

The main duties and functions for children who are privately fostered include:

- To safeguard and promote the welfare of privately fostered children.
- To promote awareness of the notification requirements.
- To ensure that those professionals who may come into contact with privately fostered children understand their role in notifications
- To respond effectively to notifications
- To deal with situations where an arrangement comes to the attention of CYPD, which has not been notified.
- To assess any private fostering arrangement to ensure the safety of children and young people
- To provide support to parents where this would prevent the need for a private fostering arrangement.
- To determine the suitability of all aspects of any private fostering arrangement in accordance with the regulations.
- To provide advice and support to private foster carers and prospective private foster carers.
- To provide advice and support to the parents of children who are privately fostered within Gloucestershire.
- To enable children who are privately fostered to access information and support when required so that their welfare is safeguarded and promoted.
- To enable privately fostered children to participate in decisions about their lives.
- To maintain and implement an effective system for monitoring the duties and functions of the local authority in relation to private fostering.
- To improve practice wherever this is indicated by monitoring and quality assurance processes.

Training of relevant staff

The nominated manager has had relevant training in private fostering issues and in child protection. The Social Workers who specialise in private fostering are based in the Fostering Friends and Family, and share the role as champions of private fostering practice. They are experienced and trained in working with care arrangements for children not living with their own parent/s, and in child protection. Specific and ongoing training opportunities about private fostering will be identified.

The Private Fostering Social Workers will have a mentoring role with other staff and will support colleagues in identifying and responding appropriately to private fostering arrangements. All relevant childcare staff have training in child protection matters.

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Nominated person

Tammy Wheatley, Head of Service - Permanence, is the nominated manager monitoring the discharge of the local authority functions in respect of private fostering, (Regulation 12).

Manager/s who will sign off decisions

Tammy Wheatley, Head of Service - Permanence, or Julie Fisher Team Manager Fostering Friends and Family Team will authorise the report of the suitability of the carer. The relevant Team Manager in the Children Safeguarding, Assessment, Children in Care teams, or Children with Disability Team, will record specific decisions about the arrangement or suitability of the Prospective Private Foster Carers in respect of each child in their care or proposed to be in their care.

Awareness raising arrangements

The communication strategy includes information on the GCC website, publicity in various publications, and dissemination of information to community groups and other agencies.

Leaflets about private fostering arrangements and notification requirements have been distributed to libraries, health centers, faith groups and language schools, and this will be renewed.

Efforts are to be further concentrated on awareness raising with other professional groups, for example in schools and health services, police, youth services, and with social care professionals.

Private fostering issues are included in multi-agency training programs. Links will be made with national awareness raising campaigns.

Suitability Criteria

Following notification of an intended, or an existing private fostering arrangement, the allocated Friends and Family practitioner will assess the safety and welfare of the young person using an Private Fostering Assessment and prepare an report about the arrangement.

This assessment considers the child's wishes and feelings as well as physical, intellectual, emotional, social and behavioral development. This assessment looks at the suitability of the household, including checks with other agencies, visits to two referees, and enhanced Criminal Records Bureau disclosures in relation to all members of the household.

The Friends and Family practitioner will clarify with the prospective private foster carers and the birth parents the objectives of the placement, contact and financial arrangements. Immediate checks are made in regard to any relevant offences of all members of the household over 16 years of age.

However, if concerns are identified at this assessment stage there may need to be discussions about alternative arrangements for the child, and whether Child Protection Procedures or emergency legal action needs to be considered where a risk of harm is identified. Or there may be a need for a Children in Need plan to run along side the Private fostering arrangement, which will identify any needs and how and by whom the needs will be addressed. A Core Assessment may be undertaken in relation to some children with more complex needs.

How Children and Young People's Social Care Service will be satisfied that the welfare of privately fostered children in Gloucestershire is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted

All private fostering arrangements will be visited by Friends and Family practitioners within the required statutory timescales. It is required that the child must be seen and spoken to alone, as appropriate to their age, and their views recorded. All arrangements are reviewed within three months of their start, and thereafter at least every six months as for the Children in Need procedures.

The Friends and Family Social Workers will maintain a regular visiting pattern to the private foster placement. An annual review of the suitability of the private foster carer will be undertaken.

Where host families are identified for children on educational placements, the Private Fostering Social Workers will undertake assessment work of the suitability of the arrangements and will visit the children when they are linked to the host families.

Regular management supervision includes the monitoring of visiting frequencies and
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any issues arising in private fostering arrangements. A file audit of carer and child records will be undertaken. Good practice will be reported and practice improvement identified and implemented.

Information about all the private fostering arrangements will be collated centrally and an annual report prepared for the Director of Children's Services. This report will include an evaluation of the outcomes of the work of Children and Young People's Service in relation to privately fostered children in Gloucestershire.

The Nominated Manager will report annually to the Gloucestershire Children's Safeguarding Board on how the welfare of privately fostered children in its area is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, including how the service co-operates with other agencies in this connection.

Advice and support available to private foster carers and prospective private foster carers, parents and others with parental responsibility, and others concerned with the privately fostered child

Prospective private foster carers and private foster carers will be visited by a Friends and Family Social Worker. The role of the Social Worker includes providing advice, support and identifying any training needs. In circumstances where it is identified that the placement is for education reasons, and the identity of the specific child to be placed in the household may not yet be known, the Private Fostering Social Worker will give appropriate advice.

Practitioners have an ongoing responsibility to consider relevant support and advice to the parents of the privately fostered child. Information to carers and parents is available in different formats and languages where needed.

The information and support that will be available to privately fostered children

Each child will have an allocated worker available for information and support.

The allocated practitioner will supply information to the child in an appropriate format which will outline the responsibilities of the private foster carers, and the ongoing responsibilities of those with parental responsibility. The information will include details about how to contact the worker. It will also describe the availability of the advocacy services, and how the child may be able to feedback on the services provided.

Specialist support and advice may be available if required through other agencies, or community organisations. This includes translation services.

Training available to private foster carers and prospective private foster carers

Private foster carers will be invited to attend training opportunities that are available to Gloucestershire foster carers. These include First Aid, supporting children in education, diversity, and child protection. The Friends and Family Social Workers can provide information about training in specialist issues which may be identified as particularly relevant in individual cases. The Social Workers will make the private foster carer aware of training available and will record training available and taken up.

The role of other agencies in assisting Gloucestershire's Children and Young People's to carry out its duty under section 67(1) of the Children Act 1989

The local authority has a duty to promote awareness in its area about the notification requirements. Improving notification rates will better safeguard the welfare of children who are privately fostering. Other agencies and community groups have a key role in identifying private fostering arrangements.

The Friends and Family Social Workers provide targeted and current information to those who may come into contact with privately fostered children. This includes links with the education service, health center's, locality services, youth service, housing officers, the police service, library services, and leisure services. Awareness raising amongst the faith communities is also key element in the promotion of community and inter-agency understanding about private fostering.

Other agencies' roles will be identified in individual Children in Need plans where appropriate.

Ofsted Inspection

Ofsted are responsible for the regulation and inspection of children's services including local authority fostering services. The National Minimum Standards and fostering regulations are designed to set a minimum acceptable standard for the safe running of fostering services. Further details are available on the website www.ofsted.gov.uk

Fairness and Diversity

The Fostering Service works within Gloucestershire County Council's Equality Objectives.

The Service aims to ensure:-

- Employees and service users alike are treated equally with fairness and respect and that their diversity is both valued and celebrated.
- That our working practices are characterised by flexibility, efficiency and excellence, reflected in a supportive management style that enables the diverse work force to realise their full potential in serving our customers.
- That our employee profile reflects diversity at every level of the organisation, and that posts will be filled through a fair system of recruitment and promotion.

Complaints by Private Foster carers

All complaints by private foster carers are taken seriously. Private foster carers are entitled to use the departmental complaints procedure. Complaints will be resolved informally where possible, by the Friends and Family social worker or their manager. When this is not possible, it may be helpful to seek a second opinion from outside the team. Carers should be advised that, if not satisfied with the response, they may take it to the Head of Service, corporate parenting manager or GCC's complaints manager.

Gloucestershire County Council welcomes the views of those people who use its services and will utilise information gathered to improve and develop the services we provide.

Full details of the corporate complaints procedures can be found through Customerservices@gloucestershire.gov.uk